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# Things in Common: Challenges of the 19th and 21st Century Librarians

Femi Cadmus

*Cornell Law Library*, [fc276@cornell.edu](mailto:fc276@cornell.edu)

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# THINGS IN COMMON

## CHALLENGES OF THE 19TH AND 21ST CENTURY LIBRARIANS

*Femi Cadmus*

**I**N THE WAKE OF THE 104th annual convention of law librarians in Philadelphia (held in July 2010), what could be more appropriate and befitting than to revisit John William Wallace's welcome address to the Congress of Librarians in Philadelphia in 1876? (The address is republished in its entirety below at pages 201-209.) Wallace, the president of Philadelphia Historical Society, had served as the seventh reporter of decisions for the U.S. Supreme Court from 1863 to 1875, and in 1841 had been appointed Librarian for the Law Association of Philadelphia.

It is astounding that the issues posed by Wallace 135 years ago bear a striking similarity to those facing the 21st century law librarian and resonate in so many ways. Wallace pondered the future of libraries and ruminated over problems associated with the increase in print information which included space management, collection arrangement, discovery, retrieval, and preservation. He surmised that the exponential nature of the growth of books and pamphlets was a result of the proliferation of knowledge and technological advances in printing, and then proposed the application of science (technology) to solve these problems. How books would be cata-

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*Femi Cadmus is Associate Law Librarian for Administration and Lecturer in Legal Research at the Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library.*



*"Finally – when the library edifice stands in broad extent erect,  
and its million books are arranged in order on its shelves –  
after this comes a problem greater than all. How, most easily –  
how, most economically – how to be most useful . . ."*

logged, housed, and retrieved as they increased in number was a source of great consternation then and to a certain degree remains a challenge to 21st-century librarians who grapple with issues arising from the proliferation of information not only in print but also in digital formats.

Rapid advances in technology have changed the way users view and access information.<sup>1</sup> Information is now increasingly available in digital formats and accessed by users through mobile devices such as eReaders, iPads, and mobile phones. There has been a deluge of electronically available materials with widespread digitization efforts like those initiated by Google, for example, which has made vast numbers of non-copyrighted books available freely on the internet. Efforts by private enterprise like Google are just the beginning and non-profits are also jumping on the digitization bandwagon. There is currently a national conversation centered on how to provide broad electronic access to United States primary legal materials.<sup>2</sup> Contributing to this ever-expanding digital landscape is the steady growth of open access digital repositories in higher education, which are being established in part to counter the commercialization and prohibitive cost of scholarly works.<sup>3</sup> So what do libraries do with these digital

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<sup>1</sup> John Palfrey in his book "Born Digital" describes the habits of digital natives born after 1980 when social digital technologies made an appearance. Digital natives manage their identities in a "shifting hybrid environment" (online and offline). John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Law.Gov is an initiative proposing that a depository of primary legal materials of the United States be made available freely to all. A series of conversations revolving around privacy, authentication, copyright, and dissemination commenced with a workshop at Stanford Law School and ended in June 2010 with a workshop at Harvard Law School. <http://resource.org/law.gov/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Harvard's DASH (Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard) provides open access to the scholarly works of Harvard faculty. Other institutions like Yale Law School continue to aggressively expand their repository offerings hosted on platforms such as Digital Commons. The Durham statement issued by the Directors of twelve law libraries, including Yale, Harvard, Duke, and Columbia, recommends that law schools switch from print to electronic publication of journals and make them available in stable and enduring electronic platforms. <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/durhamstatement>.

works now also available in print? Will they be able to regain and repurpose erstwhile shrinking space or are they taking a highly risky move if they choose to rely on digital platforms without tangible back-ups? These questions and issues relating to the retention of materials in print formats will only increase as libraries struggle to decide what can be eliminated due to the shift to digital formats.<sup>4</sup>

One other pressing concern about this digital shift is that multiple organizations sometimes work separately to accomplish the same purposes of preserving, archiving, and disseminating print and born digital materials, raising problems with duplication, overlap, and unnecessary expenses. Recognizing that digitization and archival efforts are cumbersome and expensive, and require high-level technological expertise, many institutions have established collaborative partnerships to pursue the collective purpose of opening up their collections and sharing them with users worldwide. One example is the Hathi Trust, a collective digital repository that started in 2008 as a partnership of 13 universities of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, the University of California System, and the University of Virginia. To date, there are over 7 million digitized volumes with 24 percent in the public domain.<sup>5</sup>

Preservation concerns with the instability of digital formats have figured prominently in the growth of library organizations committed to the preservation of electronic and born digital materials – these include, for example, the Legal Information Preservation Alliance, the Chesapeake Project, and the Law Library Microforms Consortium amongst others.<sup>6</sup> Libraries have also embarked on col-

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<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth report on the retention of print materials in an increasingly digital era, see Roger C. Schonfeld and Ross Housewright *What to Withdraw? Print Collections Management in the Wake of Digitization* (2009) [www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/what-to-withdraw/](http://www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/what-to-withdraw/).

<sup>5</sup> For detailed and current statistical information on the Hathi Trust, see [www.hathitrust.org/statistics\\_info](http://www.hathitrust.org/statistics_info).

<sup>6</sup> LIPA in its mission statement notes that: “Both government and private businesses and institutions have eagerly adopted digital publishing and record-keeping both as ways to save money, time, and space and to promote efficiency and control. In their haste to abandon what they perceive as cumbersome paper records and methods of dissemination, they have too often failed to take into account the

laborative ventures with private enterprise to preserve rare and valuable materials for posterity. The Lillian Goldman Law Library recently concluded a digitization venture with Gale, the *Making of Modern Law: Primary Sources, 1620-1926*, which launched officially in June 2010. The database of primary sources contains early U.S. state codes, state constitutional conventions, city charters, and early American law dictionaries, all for the most part not previously available in digital form. The downside, however, of collaborations with private enterprise is that the final product is often offered at a cost and is not freely accessible.

With shrinking budgets, libraries are seeking out collaborative opportunities more than ever. Collaboration has even extended to shared collection development. Recently Columbia and Cornell announced a partnership (2CUL – pronounced “too cool” and derived from the acronyms of both universities) in collaborative collection development, acquisitions, and processing, funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.<sup>7</sup> In September 2010, both institutions embarked on the first phase of their collaborative partnership, announcing an agreement to collaboratively support Slavic and East European collection development creating a more enriched collection.<sup>8</sup>

This collaboration has extended beyond building a significantly larger and richer collection into the arena of developing professional reference assistance in the use of the collections. Consequently, the Slavic and East European Librarian resident at Columbia would be

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long-term preservation of their electronic publications and archives.” [www.aallnet.org/committee/lipa/mission.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/committee/lipa/mission.asp). The Chesapeake Project, a collaboration of Georgetown Law Library, Maryland State Law Library, Virginia State Law Library, and Harvard Law library, similarly proposes to “successfully develop and implement a program to stabilize, preserve, and ensure permanent access to critical born-digital and digitized legal materials on the World Wide Web.” <http://cdm266901.cdmhost.com/cdm4/about.php#mission>.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on this collaborative partnership visit <http://2cul.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Columbia University Libraries Announces Slavic and East European Collection Development Agreement with Cornell University Library, <http://communications.library.cornell.edu/news/100916/slavic>.

available to Cornell users by email, telephone, and video conferencing and would also visit the Cornell campus for instruction and face-to-face instruction and consultation. The 2CUL partnership is the future of collaborative ventures between libraries, especially in an era of reduced budgets and resources. Libraries can partner to enhance and strengthen their collections and also share their most valuable institutional assets like the expertise of their professional staff.

Print is increasingly viewed as a last bastion but it appears that hard cover books are still favored by many.<sup>9</sup> As it becomes obvious that print materials will not fade away overnight, libraries are still faced with space quandaries, having to decide what is worth retaining for posterity and how select materials should be stored and retrieved quickly for library users. Similarly in 1876, Wallace, astounded by the continuing growth of print and the problems of storage and retrieval, proposed the use of science to facilitate the retrieval of books, describing in great detail the possible adoption of pneumatic tubes by libraries.<sup>10</sup> In this regard Wallace had perhaps prophetically alluded to today's automated storage and retrieval systems. Many libraries continue to use offsite storage facilities to house infrequently used but valuable materials with sophisticated systems in place to facilitate quick delivery of books when demanded by patrons. Automated storage and retrieval systems are now appearing in large research libraries, enabling users to request offsite materials which are stored in specially barcoded bins and retrieved almost instantaneously by robotic cranes. In addition, collaborative storage sharing and print storage management are viewed favorably as means of coordinating the retention of print resources and avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources. Libraries are entering into

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<sup>9</sup> Amazon reported that its sale of e-books exceeded those of traditional hard back volumes in the three months leading up to 2010. However, according to the American Publishing Association, industry-wide sales of print books have risen by 22 percent. Clair Cain Miller, E-Books top Hard Covers at Amazon, [www.nytimes.com/2010/07/20/technology/20kindle.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/20/technology/20kindle.html).

<sup>10</sup> John William Wallace, *An Address of Welcome from the Librarians of Philadelphia to the Congress of Librarians of the United States*, 14 Green Bag 2d 201, 207 (2011) (reprint of 1876 pamphlet)

## *Things in Common*

agreements as to who retains what in print. In effect there is a concerted effort by libraries to define the collections of the 21st century library.

In the midst of all these advances and changes, librarians remain an invaluable and indispensable resource in the increasingly complex and technologically advanced legal information environment, navigating users through an often overwhelming labyrinth of print and digital resources. This statement resonates with the words of John Wallace in 1876:

. . . a good librarian has ever been a valuable minister to letters. He has always stood between the world of authors and the world of readers, introducing the habitants of one sphere to the habitants of the other . . . But in this day and for the future he is called to new offices and to higher distinctions. His profession belongs to the SCIENCES. He requires some fine faculties of mind. He takes his rank with philosophers.<sup>11</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> Id. at 208-09.



AN  
ADDRESS OF WELCOME,

FROM THE  
LIBRARIANS OF PHILADELPHIA,

TO THE  
CONGRESS OF LIBRARIANS OF THE UNITED STATES,

ASSEMBLED OCTOBER 4, 1876,  
IN THE HALL OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

BY  
JOHN WILLIAM WALLACE,  
PRESIDENT OF THE SAID SOCIETY.

PHILADELPHIA:  
SHERMAN & CO., PRINTERS.  
1876.



# AN ADDRESS OF WELCOME

FROM THE LIBRARIANS OF PHILADELPHIA TO THE  
CONGRESS OF LIBRARIANS OF THE UNITED STATES

*John William Wallace*

LIBRARIANS OF THE UNITED STATES:

In behalf of the librarians of this city – seated in the circular recess behind me – I welcome you cordially to Philadelphia, and in behalf of the members of the Historical Society of our State, and for myself as well, I welcome you most cordially to this our Hall. Philadelphia in the course of her history has been the seat of many conventions. Until this year, however – this great year, both of our city and our nation – she has never had the happiness, so far as I recollect, to see within her limits a convention of librarians. The centennial year cannot, I think, but lend some distinction to it; and it, perhaps, will not be the least worthy of the distinctions of the centennial year.

But I regard this great anniversary of the nation less as the cause of this new sort of congress than as the occasion of which it avails itself to assemble. It has been somewhat obvious, I think, for several years past and is now entirely plain that with the much-increased and still much-increasing issue of books from the printing press – several matters up to this time little thought of by librarians – indeed not requiring to be much thought of by them – now demand

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*Editors' note: The title page of a pamphlet edition of Wallace's lecture is reproduced on the facing page. For a brief sketch of Wallace himself, see Femi Cadmus's article in this issue.*

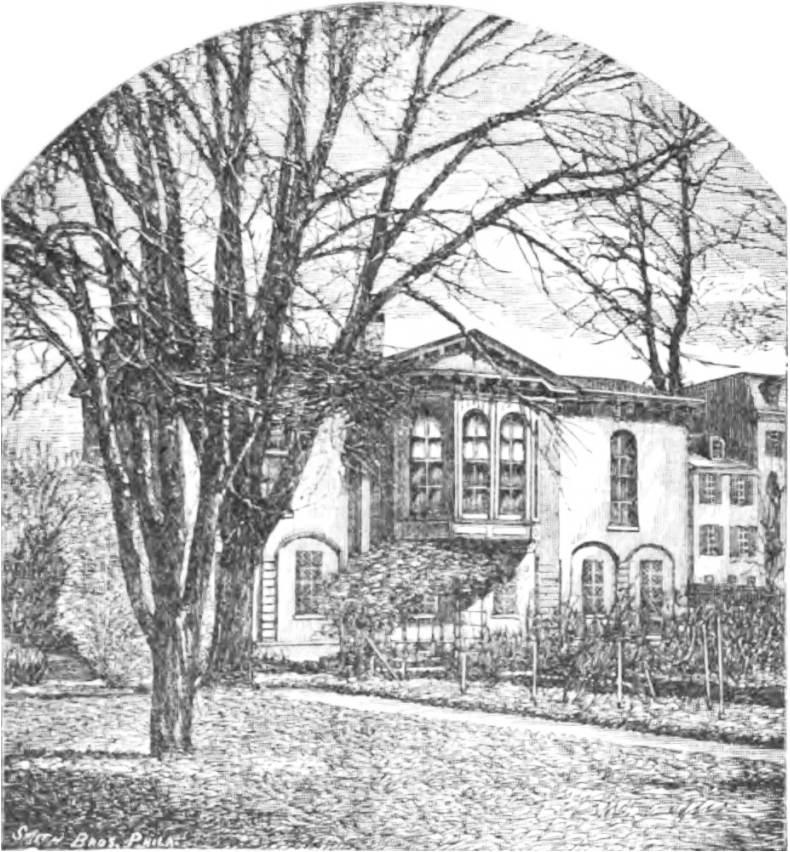
consideration and, so far as practicable, a provision for the time not far distant when they are likely to come upon us.

The increase of books to which I refer, is to be attributed in some part, I suppose, to the facility with which of late times, in consequence of the application of chemical agencies instead as formerly of mechanical ones alone, to the papermakers' art, paper itself is made; in greater part still, to the power which steam has given to the printing press, and in greatest part of all to the establishment of common schools and colleges everywhere throughout this country, by which both the capacity to write and the disposition and the ability to read are vastly increased. And as I see nothing which is likely to arrest this progress of things, alike scientific and social, I see nothing which in coming years is to stand between the librarian and an issue upon him of books upon books, so vast and so uninterrupted that unless he brings the benefit of something like SCIENCE to his aid he will be overwhelmed and buried in their very mass.

This vision of the future suggests a variety of thoughts.

In the first place, a problem arises – one which concerns more especially our opulent libraries, or such a library as that of Congress, where every book that secures a copyright is preserved – a problem as to what form of building is best suited for the library edifice. It is plain, if our larger libraries are to continue as most of them now are, libraries of a general sort – pantological collections, as we may call them – that before another century is over, immense edifices will be required, through the mere force of accumulation, to hold the volumes of which the libraries are composed. What form of such large edifice will best unite external effect with capacity of extension – indefinite extension it must be, in some direction – with safety, with convenience, and with beauty of interior? And how far, if all these things cannot coexist, must that characteristic which delights the eye give way to that which saves the feet and assists the hand; in other words, with that which promotes a capacity for getting volumes promptly from their places – often in the huge edifices which the mental eye already sees before it, far distant from the seat of the librarian – and, after they have been used, of getting the volumes promptly again to their places.

## *An Address of Welcome*



*Wallace delivered his address on libraries and librarianship at the Picture House (so called because it had originally been built to house Benjamin West's painting, "Christ Healing the Sick in the Temple"), which was the home of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania from 1872 to 1882.*

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Next. In the much-increased and ever increasing number of books coming into our libraries – those which have already entered being, we must remember, always to be preserved – how are all best to be disposed of locally; disposed of, I mean, upon the shelves of those vast buildings which the coming years present to our view? Are they to be disposed of by subjects, by size, by alphabetical arrangement; by order of publication to the world; by order of advent

to the library, or by something different from each of these? If arrangement be by subjects, or alphabetically, then in the progress and prospects of every sort of science and of every sort of human thing, and of treatises upon them all that are sure to follow, what extent of open space is to be left in each subject for probable additions of future works upon it? And in what way are these voids to be disguised so as best to obviate the appearance of a library ever incomplete? If a library has books divided according to subjects, and if all the space allotted to each subject is occupied by the books of the day when the library is formed, rearrangement, on the shelves, of the classes – nay, frequent rearrangement of the books *in* the classes – becomes requisite to accommodate in the best way future treatises in the same class. And the like thing is true of one arranged alphabetically. Rearrangement of a small library is a small matter, one which is easily accomplished and which, for the sake of giving better order and system to the whole, it is always worth while to effect. But rearrangement of a large library is a different thing indeed. Rearrangement implies renumbering. Renumbering implies recataloguing. Recataloguing implies reprinting. And when the library counts its books by the hundreds of thousands – and even by millions, as in the coming times our large libraries seem likely to do – when the books cover acres of shelves and weigh hundreds and thousands of tons, the rearrangement will become nigh to an impossibility. It would consume the lives of the learned and exhaust the fortunes of the beneficent. Vastly important it therefore is to any library which sets out with the prospect or even the possibility of being a large one, that a comprehensive, and a rightly comprehensive, scheme for the disposition of it externally be had in the very origin of things. But who is *now* to say – to say in advance of actual experience, and in advance of the reduction of that experience to a scientific and admitted truth – what is a *rightly* comprehensive scheme for libraries such as the century on which we are entering may witness?

Finally – when the library edifice stands in broad extent erect, and its million books are arranged in order on its shelves – after this comes a problem greater than all. How, most easily – how, most economically – how to be most useful, and how to prevent the ne-

## *An Address of Welcome*

cessity of frequent rearranging, of frequently reprinting that which in its largest part has once or oftener, with great pains, been arranged, and once or oftener, with great cost, been printed – how best to secure all these ends, are these immense collections which stand up in more than imagination before us – to be classified and arranged in the printed *catalogue*? Supplements, of course, are easily to be made; but when we shall have looked painfully through some dozen volumes of catalogue, how are we to follow up the search still more painfully through some scores of pamphlet supplements? We shall abandon our search in despair.

To a certain extent all the questions of which I speak have been for some years serious questions, and for some years have occupied the minds of thoughtful librarians everywhere throughout our country. But even of the latest years they have been questions of no difficulty compared with that difficulty which the future is beginning to reveal to our view.

I have said, gentlemen, that there are several problems for us to resolve. But after these problems have been resolved in the abstract, resolved, I mean, in a general way, we have many matters also acting as forces of “perturbation,” the exact value of which we must calculate and allow for. The conclusions as to local arrangement, or as to the form of catalogues which would be true ones for a library of consultation, for a library which is the resort of men of trained and disciplined minds – might prove false in a library destined for circulation chiefly; that is to say, for popular use; and the rule which would rightly prevail in a library seeking a universal character might not be found so good for collections that are content with more limited outlines. A hundred qualifications suggest themselves in every part of our subject to any conclusions which we might form on any general head.

In the midst of these questions, some of which seem nearly insoluble – and terrified as we are by the prospect of library edifices to which Versailles, the Escorial, or the Vatican shall be of humble size – comes a new question altogether; a question radical and revolutionary. Will it be practicable to continue through another century the formation of libraries, which shall contain all books upon eve-

ry subject? Will not such libraries if continued and formed tumble to pieces by their own weight, and when the subjects into which their infinite volumes are divided have all grown sufficiently large, break up and resolve themselves into their primordial elements? Our general libraries have already unloaded themselves of law, unloaded themselves of medicine, and unloaded themselves to a large degree of all books of mere physical science. Why shall they not throw off divinity and metaphysics, and a hundred other things; leaving each to establish itself as law has done, as medicine has done, as physical science in part has done, on its own special basis, and leaving itself, too, disintegrated into unity of subject. This would give us a hundred small libraries in the place of one immense one; and doubtless in some respects a small library devoted to a single subject has advantages over a large one, which is rarely perfectly complete in any.

Supposing pamphlets to come forth for another century as pamphlets are now coming forth, and for that other century to be preserved, the collection would fill a room larger than the Bodleian. No general library will or can ever preserve the half of them. Yet while in many cases most useless, in many cases they are most useful, and where not useful often most curious. A library of pamphlets – a library which should embrace everything that bears a pamphlet's title, and which should exclude everything which does not – would be a library often and to many of great utility.

Nay, why shall we not go further?

If railway companies, and coal companies, and hospitals, and colleges, and penitentiaries, and benevolent institutions of every sort – to say nothing of historical societies and library companies – keep publishing their annual reports for another century as they publish them now, may it not require the most active labor of the best librarian in America to collect, to preserve, to bind, to arrange, and catalogue them all? Yet few books are more instructive as to special matters; few more often wanted by a large class of readers.

But here the benignant Genius which ever presides over the labors of the learned interposes. "Your thoughts are at variance with the ideas of the learned in every age and every clime. They are re-

## *An Address of Welcome*

bellious and irreverent. They savor of State rights. They look unkindly at the Union. All the sorts of knowledge dwell lovingly in one abode. All the forms of truth live ever in unity and love. Diplomacy and statesmanship here are met together. Science and revelation here have kissed each other. Build your edifices as large as you will. Let story rise above story, and wings spread for infinite distance, the capacities of your main edifice. The very volumes which you fear will kindly show you how to use the largest of them all as easily as in earlier days you have used those which were among the smallest. Is not the 'elevator' to be seen in every large factory and in every large hotel? Does not the elastic tube afford means of transmitting messages through the largest buildings of our cities? Why may not the electric telegraph, itself the child of science, minister to her honored parent; and why may not the librarian, seated at his desk in the centre or on the circumference of his library-room, send his orders to the remotest part of the immensest building, to be obeyed, perhaps, through the pneumatic tube, returning with a velocity only less than that of the telegraph itself, the volume which he asks for? Are ropes and pulleys, which the world has used these thousand years, and which are used in every large factory to carry parcels from floor to floor and from one extremity of the edifice to another, to be forgotten in the places where their history and uses are recorded in a hundred tomes, and at a time when they should be called on for their noblest work?

"Why, indeed, if locomotion in horizontal space is largely needed – why may not the railway itself – traversed perhaps by cars whose form shall be the library's cushioned chair – drawn by some graceful 'dummy' whose silence shall not disturb even 'the still air of delightful studies' – why shall not the railway itself, laid in bars of steel so polished that friction and noise no less than space are annihilated – why shall not even IT come in and complete the ministration which the mechanic arts, if rightly invoked, will ever be proud to give to the labors of the learned and the good? Books of municipal law; books of medicine and surgery; books of mere science; books for professional use alone, these you can segregate from others of more general interest; but beyond this you cannot go. The student



is referred by one book to a hundred others, all unlike it, and perhaps unlike each other. Will you send him to a hundred libraries? A hundred persons would know that such and such a building contained a library, but not one in the number might know until he had entered it and found that it was *not* the sort of library which he wanted, what sort of a library it really was. To say nothing of the fact that these special libraries might each consider that certain books belonged not to *it* but to a sister 'special,' so that a book which might not unreasonably be looked for in any one would be found in none; ending thus in the result that with libraries everywhere, books were nowhere."

But, gentlemen, I will detain you no longer. With little practical experience in this matter, and with no reflection upon it at all, I see before me in the future many questions in regard to the subjects upon which I have spoken; and yet upon another subject which I have not touched, the conduct and management of these vast libraries themselves when everything else has been adjusted. You, with your great experience and deep reflectiveness, I doubt not must have seen and now behold a hundred more. Before another century rolls by they will be practical questions.

I know of no way in which these questions can be settled, but the way in which questions of science are always settled; that is to say, by careful observation and collation of facts, and, when facts sufficiently numerous are observed and collated, by the application of intelligent judgment, and the formation, through induction, of a sound result. The field is a large one. It is completely and purely a field of science. The same careful observation of phenomena which is necessary in astronomy, in chemistry, in medicine; the same right judgment to perceive what they teach, which gives to the world a Herschel, a Davy, or a Physick — these same are the qualities which are needed for any valuable conclusions about the work of which I speak. The time has arrived then for a new science — BIBLIOTHECAL SCIENCE, a wide science, a difficult science, a science of value.

Gentlemen, a good librarian has ever been a valuable minister to letters. He has always stood between the world of authors and the world of readers, introducing the habitants of one sphere to the hab-

## *An Address of Welcome*

itants of the other; interpreting often obscurities where the fault is with authors, imparting often intelligence where the fault is with readers. This, his ancient title, he still possesses. But in this day and for the future he is called to new offices and to higher distinctions. His profession belongs to the SCIENCES. He requires some fine faculties of mind. He takes his rank with philosophers.

To promote this science you, gentlemen, assemble to-day. Much to be considered, so far as it relates to the future, is new. The soundings upon the old charts have imperfect value. New soundings and new observations must be taken by yourselves. I hardly suppose that numerous conclusions of value will be reached at once. But it is a great thing to have met in corporate strength, with a united sense that much is needed, and with united experience and reflection and wisdom to consider by way of remedy what is wanted. I doubt not that this Congress will be the first of a series of Bibliothecal conventions, or congresses of librarians; that your purposes as yet in part unshaped will here take form, and that future years will feel the beneficial influence of what is here accomplished.

Most cordially, therefore, and again do I welcome you to our city and to our Hall, and pray for every blessing upon your consultations and your work.

